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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Prepared by
Food Safety
and Quality
Service

Food News for Consumers

December 1980

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USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service:

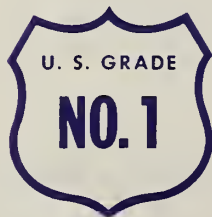
- Inspects and analyzes domestic and imported meat, poultry, and meat and poultry products;
- Establishes ingredient standards and approves recipes and labels for processed meat and poultry products;
- Inspects and analyzes liquid, dried, and frozen egg products;
- Establishes grade standards for fruits, vegetables, meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products, and provides grading services for these foods on request;
- Monitors the food industry for violations of inspection and grading laws; and
- Buys food for the USDA school lunch program and other food assistance programs.

Help for Consumers

Since October 6, FSQS has had a special number for consumers to call with their inquiries. Though the agency can't investigate all complaints about food--some aren't in its jurisdiction--you can be assured that your problem will be either solved or directed to the right place.



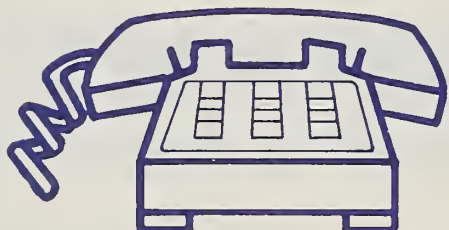
FSQS is responsible for meat and poultry inspection, assuring that all meat and poultry products are safe, wholesome, and truthfully labeled. The agency also checks certain foods for quality--meat, poultry, eggs, some dairy products, and both fresh and processed fruits and vegetables. All foods are not graded for quality by FSQS. If the food you buy, however, has a USDA grade name (such as U.S. Choice, U.S. Grade A, or U.S. No. 1) on its label, the quality of that food was certified by FSQS.



FSQS can respond directly to many types of complaints. Some examples: you've found a foreign object like a hair or a piece of metal in your can of spaghetti and meat balls; you've become ill after eating a bologna sandwich, and you suspect it was caused by the bologna; a can of chicken noodle soup in your cupboard is swollen or leaking; you bought some frozen green beans labeled U.S. Grade A that are full of stems or a U.S. Grade A chicken covered with pin feathers; or there's no meat in your can of franks and beans.

In short, any complaint having to do with with a product containing meat or poultry or with any product FSQS has graded should be directed to FSQS. For problems with other foods, contact the Food and Drug Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Consumer Help continued

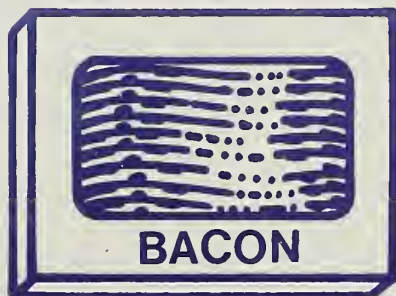


In order to get a response more quickly and efficiently, here are the things you should provide:

- name, address, and home and work telephone numbers;
- a description of your complaint;
- the entire label from the product and the date of purchase, if possible; and
- if the complaint is about a meat or poultry product, the establishment code number from the product's container. The establishment code number identifies the plant in which the product was processed or packaged. It can be found either in the inspection legend (the round symbol with letters USDA inside) or somewhere on the packaging. It will be preceded by "EST" on meat products and by "P" on poultry products.

The number to call is (202) 472-4485; or write FSQS Consumer Inquiries, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Nitrite Studies to Continue



On August 19, FSQS and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a joint statement which said, in part, that "there is no basis for FDA or USDA to initiate any action to remove nitrite from foods at this time."

Review of the 1978 Massachusetts Institute of Technology study on nitrite revealed a lower incidence of cancer than originally reported. Because of the continuing controversy surrounding the regulation of sodium nitrite in the food supply, however, USDA and FDA have asked the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to study the procedures used to evaluate research on toxic substances in food. All relative data on nitrite will be evaluated, and NAS will recommend approaches for further research on nitrite and possible alternatives.

USDA will continue to enforce its regulations to eliminate nitrosamines in the meat and poultry supply. Nitrosamines are known carcinogens and form when nitrite combines, under certain conditions, with naturally occurring substances called amines.

How to Obtain Free Copies

Single free copies of press releases, Federal Register reprints, studies, fact sheets, and publications mentioned in the FSQS section of this newsletter are available from regional information offices across the country (see page 11) or from FSQS Information, Room 3606-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Phone: (202) 447-5223.

Where to Send Comments

Send your comments on proposals in the FSQS section to: Regulations Coordination Division, Room 2637-S, FSQS, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250. Usually two copies are requested. Be sure to identify the proposal you are commenting on by referring to the title of informal proposals or, for formal proposals, the date of publication in the Federal Register.

Tips on Writing Comments

For tips on how to give your comments more weight, write for the FSQS brochure called "Public Participation: Getting Involved in FSQS" (June 1980).

Nitrite Studies
continued

For more information: Press Releases #1649-80 (8-19-80) and #1792-80 (9-16-80) and Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Carol Tucker Foreman's statement on nitrite in foods to the Agriculture Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives (9-16-80).

Quality Control Program Ready



USDA has implemented a quality control inspection system which will modernize federal inspection of processed meat and poultry products. Processing plants, which produce such items as frankfurters, frozen dinners, and soups containing meat and poultry, will have the option of changing to the new inspection system. The new system does not apply to inspection in slaughtering operations.

The new system will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the inspection program by utilizing technological advances in the processing industry. Inspectors can make use of additional objective information, such as lab records, in their decision-making. As a result, regulation will be improved, and the overall inspection program will be more effective because more emphasis can be placed on other concerns in inspection.

Under the new inspection program, a firm operating a quality control system can voluntarily apply to USDA for approval of its system. The firm must be able to assure USDA that its system will produce products in compliance with the requirements of the inspection laws for wholesomeness and label accuracy. In a quality control system, critical points in production are monitored, and records are maintained. These critical points in processing meat and poultry products are any part of the production where the safety of the product could be affected or accurate labeling could be jeopardized.

Inspectors assigned to quality control plants will monitor the plants' quality control systems to assure that they are being properly administered and that products are in compliance. Inspectors will also take product samples for testing in USDA labs as one means of verifying that plant records are correct.

For more information: Press Releases #2124-79 (9-13-79), #2944-79 (12-27-79), and #1615-80 (8-14-80); a fact sheet on voluntary quality control (FSQS-46, October 1980); and the Aug. 15 Federal Register.

Tenderizers Allowed in all Meats and Mature Poultry

Effective October 6, processors may use tenderizers in all red meats and mature poultry. Formerly, tenderizers were permitted in beef only.

If tenderizers--called proteolytic enzymes--are used, the label must so indicate with a descriptive statement next to the product name--for example, "Tenderized with Papain." If any substance other than water is used in the enzyme solution, it must also be shown on the label. Weight gain from an enzyme solution is limited to three percent above the weight of the raw, untreated product.

Tenderizers
continued

Enzymes permitted under the new rule are papain, bromelin, ficin, aspergillus oryzae, and the aspergillus flavus oryzae group. They are generally recognized as safe for use in human food by the Food and Drug Administration.

For more information: Press Release #1728-80 (9-4-80).

For Teachers Only



In November every public and private elementary and secondary school in the country will receive copies of USDA's new classroom materials on food safety and quality. The packages in this new outreach effort are:

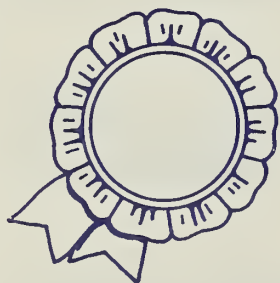
- "Taking a Look at Food Quality" for grades four through six;
- "A Food-Safe Plan" for grades four through six; and
- "Food Safety: Your Responsibility" for grades seven through twelve.

Each education package includes a teacher's guide, reproducible activity masters, and a two-sided, color wall chart. The most up-to-date teaching techniques are used in the lessons, with games, puzzles, and other visuals to enhance the learning process.

For years, the Department has provided the public with tips on buying food and keeping it safe to eat. Most of this information has been geared to adults. If elementary and secondary school teachers wanted to include this information in their curricula, they had to develop their own lesson plan. Now, these educators have ready-to-use lessons on food safety and quality for our younger citizens, who are quite capable of helping their families shop for and handle food.

Over the next year or so, USDA plans to reproduce portions of the packages for general distribution. The Department may also develop teaching guides for adult education courses, to be used both in the classroom and on institutional television.

National Food Safety Poster Contest Coming



USDA's first national food safety poster contest will start in January. The contest is another effort by FSQS to reduce foodborne bacterial poisoning. Much food-related illness can be prevented by the proper handling of food--especially meat and poultry--in the home.

In January each public and private school in the country with students in kindergarten through sixth grade will receive a poster contest kit. The kit will contain information for teachers and students on food safety and on the contest rules. Included will be two reproducible activity masters on the safe handling of food that can be used as classroom activities.

There will be two national winners--one from the kindergarten through third grade entries and one from the grade four through six entries. All entries will become the property of FSQS, which will use some of them in its continuing campaign to increase public awareness of food hazards and how to prevent them.

Enforcing the Laws

The following are some recent actions taken by FSQS to protect the nation's food supply.

meat grading case settlement



On September 8, Swift Fresh Meats, a meat processing plant at Cactus, Texas, entered into a consent decision with USDA in settlement of its alleged violations of the Agricultural Marketing Act. Under the terms of the decision, federal meat grading and acceptance services will be withdrawn from the firm for six months if it offers gratuities to USDA employees during a year's period. (It is illegal for federal employees to accept gratuities.) USDA alleged that the firm provided food and beverages to two federal graders at company Christmas parties in violation of the Act. The consent decision is for settlement purposes only; it does not constitute an admission of the allegations. Press Release #1817-80 (9-18-80).

meat plant may lose inspection



On September 25 a USDA administrative law judge ordered the indefinite withdrawal of federal meat inspection from Wyszynski Provision Co., Philadelphia, Pa., unless the firm's vice president, Walter J. Wyszynski, gives up all association with the firm within 90 days and sells his company stock within one year. The order was based on Wyszynski's earlier felony conviction for the preparation, sale, and transportation of adulterated sausage products. The firm was fined \$10,000, and Wyszynski was fined \$5,000 and sentenced to three years' probation. The fines were subsequently reduced to \$8,000 and \$2,000 respectively. Press Release #1924-80 (10-9-80).

inspection withdrawn

On September 1, federal meat inspection was withdrawn for six months from Shaffer's Abattoir, Inc., a meat processing plant in New Cumberland, Pa., because of a 1979 felony conviction of offering adulterated meat food products for sale. The firm cannot process meat for wholesale distribution without federal inspection. Press Release #1725-80 (9-2-80).

adulterated pork

Two New Jersey firms were fined \$500 each on September 10 after pleading guilty to violations of the Federal Meat Inspection Act in Sept. 1979. Reliable Packing Co., Inc., a meat processing plant in Elmer, was fined for preparing for sale pork loins not fit for human consumption. Eatmor Market, Inc., a retail market in Bridgeton, was fined for transporting the adulterated pork within New Jersey. Press Release #1818-80 (9-18-80).

misabeled ground beef

On Aug. 12, Portion King, Inc., a meat processing plant in Perth Amboy, N.J., was fined a total of \$6,200 in U.S. District Court, Newark, after pleading guilty to the preparation and selling of adulterated ground beef last January. Labeling on the product did not show it contained a soy derivative. FSQS Release 9-18-80.

What's New from FSQS

food additives

See box on page 2 to order any of the following new materials.

A general fact sheet explaining why additives are used, how they are regulated, and which additives are allowed in meat and poultry products. Ask for FSQS-32 (August 1980).

residues in meat and poultry

A fact sheet explaining why and how FSQS tests meat and poultry for additives, environmental contaminants, and drug residues. Ask for FSQS-26 (July 1980).

net weight labeling

A backgrounder that explains USDA's latest proposal on net weight labeling regulations for meat and poultry. Ask for "Background on: Net Weight Labeling" (August 1980).

Other FSQS News

USDA extends comment period on dry curing bacon to Sept. 25. Press Release #1548-80 (8-5-80).

USDA stops importing meat from Guatemala. Press Release #1580-80 (8-8-80).

Food safety laboratory to be dedicated in St. Louis. Press Release #1627-80 (8-18-80).

FSQS established freedom of information request procedures. Press Release #1643-80 (8-18-80).

USDA proposes changes in standards for frozen beans. Press Release #1716-80 (8-28-80). Comment period ended September 30.

USDA seeks information on humane watering of livestock. Press Release #1753-80 (9-11-80). Comments were due November 12.

USDA seeks public comments on inspection and grading guidelines. Press Release #1769-80 (9-11-80). Comments were due November 12.

USDA to reopen comment period on food grading proposal. Press Release #1791-80 (9-16-80). Comments were due October 1.

USDA allows Guatemala meat shipments to enter U.S. Press Release #1903-80 (10-3-80).

USDA extends effective date for carcass "ribbing" requirements to Jan. 12. Press Release #1900-80 (10-3-80).

USDA increases pay rates for inspection services. Press Release #1904-80 (10-3-80).

Tuskegee Institute to study new poultry inspection procedures. Press Release #1914-80 (10-7-80).

USDA bans installation of PCB-equipment after Nov. 13. Press Release #1952-80 (10-16-80).

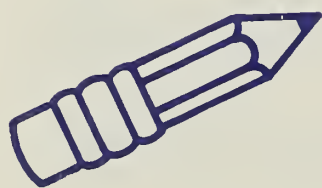
USDA buys chicken patties for school lunches. Press Release #1963-80 (10-17-80).

USDA announces changes in standards for food containers. Press Release #1979-80. (10-21-80).

USDA designates two meat plants "chronic problem" plants. Press Release #1994-80 (10-23-80).

USDA extends comment period on net weight labeling proposal. New deadline for comments is January 5, 1981. Press Release #2006-80 (10-27-80).

USDA inaugurates new program to modernize meat and poultry inspection in 3 plants. Press Release #2007-80 (10-30-80).



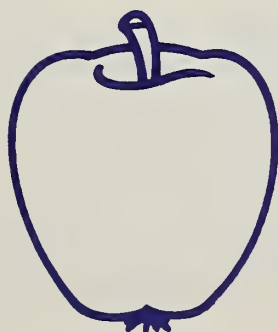
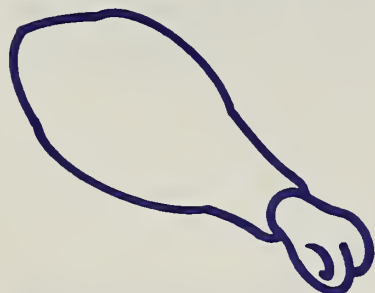
Agricultural Marketing Service



USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service:

- Gathers and disseminates current information on prices, supplies, and other market data;
- Provides cotton and tobacco standardization, inspection, grading, and testing services on request;
- Administers several regulatory programs designed to protect producers, handlers, and consumers from careless, deceptive, or fraudulent marketing practices;
- Administers marketing agreement and order programs to help establish and maintain the orderly marketing of milk, fruits, and vegetables;
- Provides patent protection to developers of certain novel plant varieties; and
- Monitors industry-sponsored and -financed research and promotion programs.

Food Forecast



Turkeys will remain adequate in supply throughout the holiday period, and a bumper supply of prunes offers an economical variation on many dishes.

USDA's Food Marketing Alert, a capsule forecast of expected food supplies, reports the following foods should be plentiful in December: pork, broiler-fryers, milk and dairy products, fresh apples and winter pears, almonds, filberts, walnuts, rice, oranges, grapefruit, and tangerines.

Foods expected to be in adequate supply--enough to meet normal needs--are: beef, eggs, fresh cranberries, major canned noncitrus fruits and vegetables, canned frozen and chilled citrus fruit, potatoes, onions, and other fresh vegetables, and processed vegetables.

Also, not exactly edible, but--there will be an adequate to plentiful supply of Christmas trees available for decoration throughout the nation. Expanded growing of Christmas trees, particularly in the South, appears to be offsetting losses caused by drought in the West.

Monthly issues of Food Marketing Alert--along with special issues that cover certain foods that are in temporary oversupply in the marketplace--are distributed to the news media. Consumers should watch for this information in newspaper food pages, consumer broadcast programming, and Cooperative Extension Service bulletins.

USDA also distributes Food Marketing Alert to people who communicate with consumers, but not to individual consumers. For a sample copy and order blank, write: Information Division, AMS, Rm. 3087-S, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Food and Nutrition Service

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers:

- The food stamp program;
- The national school lunch and school breakfast programs;
- The special supplemental food program for women, infants, and children (WIC); and
- The food distribution, child care food, summer food service, special milk and food service equipment assistance programs.

Fourteen Workfare Sites Named



Fourteen workfare sites, at which food stamp recipients will work at public service jobs in exchange for their food stamps, were recently named by USDA. Communities operating workfare will be reimbursed one-half the cost of operating them under the \$1.5 million dollar pilot program run jointly by USDA and the Department of Labor. The program is authorized to run through September 1981 at the following sites: Nashua, New Hampshire; Montgomery County, Maryland; Tazewell County, Virginia; Greenville County and Berkeley County, South Carolina; Pinellas County, Florida; the consortium of Sebastian and Crawford Counties, Arkansas; Lonoke County, Arkansas; the city of Evansville with Vanderburgh County, Indiana; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Utah County, Utah; the city of Springfield with Gree County, Missouri; San Diego County, California; and Yuma, Arizona. Last year workfare projects were operating in seven communities. Congress authorized a one-year extension of the pilot program last May.

WIC Food Packages

USDA's special supplemental food program for women, infants, and children (WIC) has recently expanded the number of food packages offered from three to six in a move to better meet the dietary needs of the program's participants. WIC currently provides food and nutrition education, as an adjunct to health care, to 2.1 million low-income women and children up to five years of age with special nutritional needs. The six new food packages are specifically designed for these six groups of participants: infants through 3 months, infants 4 through 12 months, women and children with special dietary needs, children 1 to 5 years, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women.

The food packages include such items as adult and infant cereal, juice, eggs, milk and cheese, iron-fortified formula, and the latest additions of dried beans, peas, or peanut butter. The new food packages were announced in the Nov. 7 Federal Register.

Science and Education Administration



USDA's Science and Education Administration:

- Plans and coordinates food and agriculture research, extension, and teaching efforts;
- Conducts federal research programs in the food and agricultural sciences;
- Communicates and demonstrates agricultural research results;
- Provides information and expertise needed by policy, regulatory, and action agencies of USDA and other federal departments; and
- Provides information systems and library services in the food and agricultural sciences.

A Hassle-Free Diet Guide



"A Hassle-Free Guide to a Better Diet," a mini-version of USDA's "Food" publication, is now available from USDA.

The guide discusses the nutritional value of foods in five groups and suggests the number of servings of each to provide adequate protein, and supply most of the vitamins and minerals needed daily, as a foundation for a good diet. It recommends eating a wide assortment of foods from the vegetable-fruit, bread-cereal, milk-cheese, and meat-poultry-fish-beans groups. It also notes that foods in the fats-sweets-alcohol group provide calories but few nutrients.

Single free copies of the "Hassle-Free Guide to a Better Diet" (L-567) are available from state cooperative extension nutrition specialists at land grant universities or by writing to: Publications Division, OGPA, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Does Your Diet Meet RDA's?

More than 90 percent of 3,500 households surveyed by USDA in 1977 used food that met the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for protein, phosphorus, riboflavin, and ascorbic acid, according to Betty R. Peterkin, a USDA nutritionist.

But Peterkin said that only about two-thirds of the households surveyed had diets that met the RDA for calcium and vitamin B6.

High income did not assure that diets would meet the RDA for the various nutrients. For example, more than one-fourth of the households that had an income of \$20,000 or over in 1976 failed to meet the RDA for calcium.

Minerals in Whole Wheat

Whole wheat does contribute iron and several other minerals to the diet.

Until now, it was reported that iron and other minerals were not nutritionally available to the body from whole wheat because they were linked to phytate, a chemical present in cereal bran and husks. It had been thought that the phytate in wheat interfered with absorption of minerals.

Recently, however, a USDA study of ten male volunteers found that the minerals in whole wheat can be absorbed by the body when whole wheat is consumed in normal amounts.

Whole Wheat
continued

The men ate 36 grams (1-1/4 oz.) of wheat bran a day, an amount considered high to normal. The bran was eaten in phytate-free muffins for 15 days and in muffins with phytate for another 15 days. The men absorbed about the same amounts of iron, zinc, magnesium, manganese, copper, and calcium on both diets.

A Guide to Sodium in Foods and Drugs

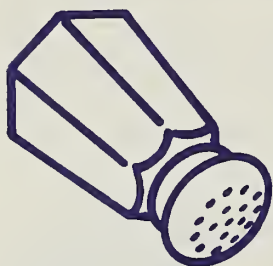


Table salt, or sodium chloride, is the most common source of sodium in the American diet. But sodium also occurs naturally in many foods, and sodium-containing compounds are often used in food processing.

We need some sodium in our diets. For the average adult, between 1,100 and 3,300 milligrams a day is adequate. Current estimates of daily sodium intake by individuals range from 2,300 to 6,900 milligrams. One teaspoon of salt contains about 2,000 milligrams. Excess sodium in the diet is believed to contribute to high blood pressure (hypertension) in some people. Control of body weight and restriction of sodium consumption are among treatments prescribed by physicians to control high blood pressure.

If you want to know the amount of sodium in your diet, you may order a new guide which lists the sodium content of 788 foods and 19 non-prescription drugs.

For a single free copy of "The Sodium Content of Your Food," Home and Garden Bulletin 233, write to SEA Publications Requests and Distribution, USDA, Room 6007-S, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Many Uses for Soybeans



Ways of preparing and serving soybean products are given in a USDA booklet entitled "Soybeans as Human Food--Unprocessed and Simply Processed."

One versatile soybean product covered in this publication is tofu. Tofu, a popular foodstuff in the Orient, is a rich source of nutrients and can be eaten in a variety of ways. Although it is called "meat without bones" in China, it has a soft, cream cheese-like consistency that is quite different from meat. Tofu can be served uncooked with flavorings added such as soy sauce or green onions. It also can be stewed with meat, fish, and vegetables and can be put in a blender with oil and lemon juice to make soy mayonnaise.

Other soybean products include soybean sprouts, soybean paste, soy flour, soy beverage, and tou chiang or soybean milk. Tou chiang can be used in many recipes the same way as cow's milk and can also be made into yogurt. However, unless the soybean milk is fortified, it contains much less calcium than cow's milk.

"Soybeans as Human Food--Unprocessed and Simply Processed" is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, for \$2.40.

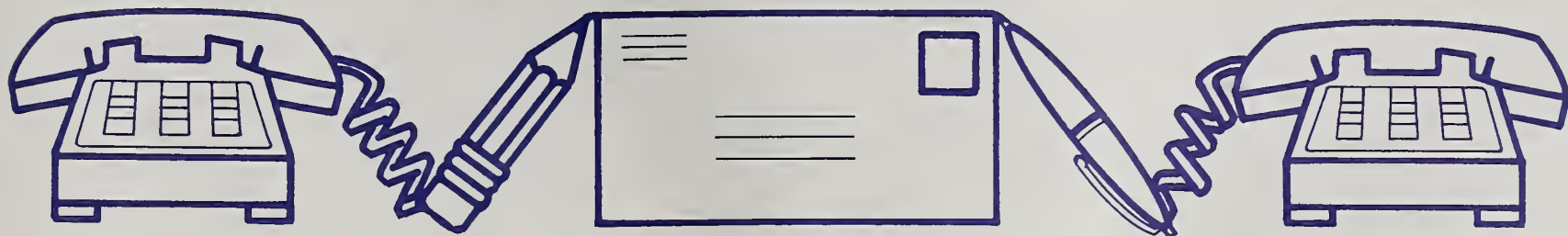
\$2.8 Million Awarded for Human Nutrition Research



Twenty-eight human nutrition research projects received \$2.8 million in funding through USDA's competitive research grant programs in Fiscal Year 1980.

The human nutrition grants support basic research to help fill gaps in knowledge about the body's nutrient requirements; how the body uses nutrients; and the nutritional quality of foods consumed in the United States.

The grants, administered by the Science and Education Administration, were awarded to researchers at universities and private organizations.



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Food News for Consumers

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